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SUBJECT: ANDHRA PRADESH: MAOIST REVERSES ... BUT WILL THEY LAST?

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: With effect from mid-January 2007, The Communist Party of India Maoist (CPI-Maoist), also known as Naxalites, says it has suspended major activities in Andhra Pradesh (AP). The move comes after several months of Maoist setbacks in the state, including killings of several party leaders in police encounters and seizures of arms and ammunitions from Maoist camps. Media reports further claim Maoist leaders are planning to transform the banned grouping into a non-violent, mainstream people's organization to oppose the policies of AP's ruling Congress government. Despite these developments, the recent seizures of Maoist arms and documents also point to the possibility that the Maoists continue to plan to raise a guerilla army. While Andhra Pradesh, for long the part of the Naxalite heartland, saw a downturn of Maoist violence in 2006, some level of clashes are likely to continue between the rebels and state police.

UPING THE ANTE ON ANTI-MAOIST OPERATIONS

12. (SBU) In recent years, the Andhra Pradesh (AP) police have enjoyed considerable success against the Maoists, successfully pinpointing the movements of Maoist dalams (armed squads) and thereby dramatically reducing incidents of Maoist violence. The number of civilians killed by Maoists (as estimated by the police) dropped from 211 in 2005 to 42 in 2006. In 2005 approximately 601 Maoists surrendered, about 269 did so in 2006. Combing operations and encounter killings resulted in about 124 Maoists killed by police in 2005, as compared to an estimated 110 in 2006. The aborted peace negotiations of May 2004, followed by the January 2005 announcement by the Maoists that they would withdraw from peace talks gave impetus to Congress Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy to use a two-pronged approach to tackle the Maoists. Reddy declared the strategy would include implementation of development programs in Maoist-affected districts to wean away potential recruits, combined with strict law and order enforcement to check violence. The later has already shown demonstrable results and enabled the police, with the help of intelligence inputs from across the state and country, to fight the rebels. Weakening of the Maoist cadre is especially credited to the intensive combing operations in the Nallamalla forest area spanning five districts by the Greyhounds, an elite security team devoted to anti-Maoist operations. Post's interlocutors also credit state law enforcement with avoiding large scale violent situations through preemptive actions to force surrenders and to kill alleged Maoist attackers.

13. (U) In recent months, seizures of arms and arrests of important Maoist leaders have further weakened the party cadre. Last December, Anantapur district police seized a large number of rockets and mines from four Maoist camps. Earlier, in October 2006 in Vijayawada city, police recovered landmines which supposedly were

being taken to the rebel hideouts in the forest areas. Last September, AP police conducted a massive seizure of hundreds of Chennai-made rocket shells and dozens of rocket launchers from the warehouses of a transport company in the Mahabubnagar and Prakasam districts (ref A). Working with the Tamil Nadu police to undercover the arms supplying network, AP state police on October 17 arrested a Maoist couple wanted for their involvement in inter-state weapons manufacturing and transport. In this major blow to the Maoists, Raghu (alias Srinivasa Reddy and alias Madhu) and his wife, Sudharani (alias Sridevi), surrendered to AP police in Warangal district.

14. (U) Last November, police killed top Maoist leader Obluesh, a state committee member, and eight other Maoists in the Gopavaram forests of Kadapa district. Obulesh was reportedly in line to take over as the next CPI-Maoist state committee secretary. Also slain in the encounter were his wife Prasanthi, who was Guntur district secretary, and Mallikarjuna, Anantapur district secretary. Later,

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on November 24, another top Maoist leader was killed in East Godavari district near the Vishakhapatnam border. Continuing with last year's successful arrests of Maoist guerillas, police apprehension a person in Khammam led to a bust of two weapon making units in Rourkela (Orissa) and Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh) and the arrest of 13 Maoists rebels on January 11. An earlier arrest on January 9 of two important CPI-Maoist Central (national) Committee members in Bhadrachalam district in Andhra Pradesh was a major breakthrough and provided substantial information about the Maoist insurgency in India.

MAOIST TRANSFORMATION - MYTH OR REALITY?

15. (SBU) Human Rights Forum lawyer K. Balagopal confirmed media

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reports that the CPI-Maoist leadership is considering new strategies in an attempt to strengthen their following in Andhra Pradesh. He explains that "unlike Chhattisgarh where the focus was on mass killings, Andhra Pradesh violence, so far, was targeted but not powerful enough." Balagopal previously filed cases for the Maoists against the state, and he is still in close contact with the group's leadership. He says the leadership told him that due to their weakened base, they are discussing non-violent strategies to transform the banned organization into a mainstream political party.

While the Maoist movement traditionally has claimed to seek an end to the exploitation of poor and landless farmers, the new grouping would go further by raising issues of a separate Telangana area, tribal displacement at project sites, and land acquisition for special economic zones (SEZs). Even Balagopal, however, questions whether or not the Maoists' truly plan to give up violence as a tactic.

16. (SBU) Andhra Pradesh Police Intelligence Chief Arvinda Rao confirms that the rebels are on the run and growing weaker, but he disagrees with the view they plan to reform into a normal political party. Rather, Rao maintains that confiscated of CPI-Maoist documents reveal plans to create a guerilla army. Referencing the recent seizures of arms and ammunition, Rao emphasizes that "in fact, (Maoist) attainment of self-sufficiency by manufacturing and owning arms and ammunitions is a cause of concern for us." The state police also have reasons to believe the Maoists are recruiting new cadre for their underground movement. Nevertheless, Rao told us that Maoist attacks on vital installations or business establishments AP are unlikely in the near future given the weakened condition of the party.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: Andhra Pradesh's strict, sometimes heavy handed law-and-order approach has destabilized the Maoist insurgency and forced their activities to move into the bordering states of Chhattisgarh and Orissa, as well as Jharkhand. AP police estimate that the overall strength of the Maoist armed cadres in the state has been reduced from the previous 1,000 to about 450. This is quite significant given the fact that Maoist violence in AP has claimed more than 6,000 lives since 1967. As the Maoists struggle

to revive their membership -- whether by advocating violence or a civic approach -- the Greyhounds and state police intend to remain vigilant to counter and comprehensively root out their presence. Given the state's history of cyclical Naxalite violence followed by law enforcement gaining the upper hand, the counter-insurgency and violence are likely to continue - though at a lower level compared to years past.

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